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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001142

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DEPT FOR AID/OTI (RPORTER), DRL/SEAS (GRICKMAN)

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KIRF VE

SUBJECT: CHAVEZ REJECTS ANTI-SEMITISM CHARGE IN MEETING
WITH JEWISH DELEGATION

REF: A. CARACAS 000969
1B. CARACAS 000706
1C. 07 CARACAS 002327
1D. 07 CARACAS 002174

CARACAS 00001142 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. A delegation of Jewish leaders, led by World Jewish Congress (WJC) President Ronald Lauder, visited Venezuela August 12 - 13 and met with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. According to the President of the Confederation of Israeli Associations of Venezuela (CAIV), Chavez rejected characterizations of himself or the Venezuelan government as anti-Semitic. All participants expressed satisfaction with the meeting and Chavez promised to continue to take concrete steps to combat anti-Semitism in Venezuela.
END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) The August 13 meeting between Chavez and the delegation of Jewish leaders resulted in a series of positive pronouncements by all those involved. Chavez himself called the meeting "important," in statements to the press but went no further. According to Confederation of Israeli Associations of Venezuela (CAIV) President Abraham Levy Benshimol, a participant in the meeting, Chavez said that the actions and statements of some groups should not be seen as politically motivated, referring to anti-Semitic messages in official media. Chavez demurred when asked about the December 2007 raid of the Caracas Jewish Community Center. Noting that he has experienced discrimination personally, Chavez categorically denied that he is anti-Semitic.

¶13. (C) Levy and CAIV Vice President David Bittan also said Chavez claimed to have told Iranian President Ahmadinejad that he disagreed with his declaration that "Israel be wiped off the map." The Venezuelan President, they said, made an offer to make a pronouncement against discrimination, including anti-Semitism, with Brazilian President Lula and Argentinean President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner in the upcoming summit in Brazil. When the delegation asked Chavez to send a Venezuelan Ambassador to its Embassy to Israel, not present since 2005, Levy told Poloffs that Chavez asked Foreign Minister Nicholas Maduro to study the issue and find an appropriate replacement.

¶14. (C) Levy and Bittan told Poloffs they have lacked a true link to the BRV since the departure from his position of former Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel, who acted as a link between the community and the BRV. Levy said Chavez told the delegation that Foreign Minister Maduro, newly

appointed Presidential Chief of Staff Hector Rodriguez, and Presidential Advisor Maximiliano Arveleiz would follow issues of interest to the Jewish community. The three would take over the role from former Chief of Staff and current candidate for mayor of Caracas's Sucre borough Jesse Chacon, who met with CAIV leaders recently and started to develop good relations with the Jewish community.

¶ 15. (C) At a reception in honor of Lauder and the delegation hosted by Bittan and attended by Ambassador Duddy, Argentine Ambassador to the United States Hector Timerman told the Ambassador that the meeting with Chavez was partly the result of efforts by Argentine President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and Brazilian President Lula to convince Chavez to meet with the group. Cooperation between Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela was a consistent theme throughout the delegation's meeting with Chavez.

¶ 16. (SBU) According to local and international press, the delegation was pleased with Chavez's statements both during the meeting and after. President of the Latin American Jewish Congress (LAJC) Jack Terpins said, "the global Jewish community is more at peace with President Chavez," and LAJC Michael Schneider said that, "when it comes to anti-Semitism, I think we're on the same page." Schneider also expressed optimism that Chavez would fulfill pledges to work to eliminate anti-Semitism in Venezuela and improve dialogue with Venezuela's Jewish community.

¶ 17. (SBU) The delegation that met with Chavez on August 13 included Lauder, Maduro, Rodriguez, Schneider, Timerman, Levy, Venezuelan Ambassador to the United States Bernardo Alvarez, Treasurer of the WJC Eduardo Elsztain, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the WJC Matthew Bronfman, Secretary General of the LAJC Saul Gilvich, and Director of the LACJ

CARACAS 00001142 002.2 OF 002

Claudio Epelman.

COMMENT

¶ 18. (C) After the meeting with Chavez, the Jewish community delegation, felt the Venezuelan President is now more personally aware of the repercussions of appearing anti-Semitic internationally. They noted that Chavez seems to be keen on avoiding the anti-Semitic label and appears aware of the costs associated with it. The Jewish community intends to follow up on this meeting with BRV interlocutors designated by Chavez and will continue to monitor developments closely.

DUDDY